

**Effectiveness of Content Based
Instruction in ESL Classroom**

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Abstract:

Content based language instruction can support English as second language (ESL) students to achieve enhanced learning and teaching outcomes. Content-Based Instruction (CBI) has been found to be an effective approach to teach English as a second language because with CBI, students can develop their language skills as well as gain access to new concepts through meaningful content. In order to help students to acquire the cognitive academic language proficiency necessary for college level work, college English instructors are now expected to have an appreciated competency of developing or implementing content-based materials and programs. All teachers who work with language-minority students must play a part in helping their students to gain the linguistic ability, content knowledge and academic skills necessary to succeed in their life. The purpose of this paper is to brief out the effectiveness of using content-based language instruction in the ESL classrooms. By applying the content-based instruction teaching technique, students can acquire English abilities, not only to communicate, but also to

use as a tool to comprehend the subject matter. The paper also covers several issues to be considered in the application of CBI such as assessment of language and content and the use of CBI in the ESL classroom.

Key words: CBI, enhanced learning, ESL classroom, comprehend, assessment

INTRODUCTION

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is a major approach in language education (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989). CBI is a teaching approach that focuses on learning language through learning about something. It is designed to provide second-language learners instruction in content and language. Although CBI is not new, there has been an increased interest in it because it has proven very effective in ESL and EFL programs around the world. Content-based teaching differs from traditional language classes because language comes second to the content. In other words, the teacher runs a course on current affairs, or American history, or fiction writing, through which students also learn English. It's important to note that English ends up as subordinate to the material, although the teacher must recognize and be prepared to help students. This teaching approach is considered by many researchers an effective and realistic teaching method in terms of combining language and content learning. According to Crandall (1999), CBI can be used in various ways depending on the skills being taught and includes not only traditional teaching methods such as grammar-based instruction or vocabulary development but also contemporary approaches such as communicative language teaching and humanistic methods. This teaching method can simultaneously help learners use the foreign language to express their thoughts in different situations, and further use it as a tool to comprehend the subject matter.

CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTION

Content based instruction is a powerful phenomenon in language teaching. The students focus on the subject matter than the language learning process. Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is a significant approach in language education (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989). CBI is planned to provide second-language learners instruction in content and language. CBI is a successful www.ijellh.com

method of combining language and content learning. It is teaching organized around the content or information that students will acquire and not around the linguistic and other type of syllabus. The presentation of topics or tasks from subject matter is integrated in this method. According to Krashen (1982), in content-based instruction, students can acquire the content area of the subject matter with comprehensible input, and simultaneously increase their language skills. To achieve the goal of language skills improvement, Krashen states that the focus of the teaching is on the authentic and meaningful input, not on the grammatical form. Grammar is seen as a component of other skills. Here language is seen as a combination of several skills used together. In classrooms real and meaningful conversation take place. Students will be able to use more advanced thinking skills when learning new information and will focus less on the structure of the language. This approach is very student-centered as it depends entirely on the students' ability to use the language. Students show their entire interest when this method is used.

CBI APPROACH AND THEORY

CBI is based on the following two principles.

People learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself. This principle serves as an encouragement for CBI which leads to more effective and efficient learning of language.

Content based instruction better reflects learners' needs for learning a second language. This principle helps the ESL (English for Second Language) students to achieve success in their main stream; as a result, the need to receive content learning and teaching within a short span of time and also the process through which such learning and teaching are realized form an important priority.

In CBI language plays an important role in learning content. Here the focus of teaching is that the meaning & information are to be communicated only through texts and discourse. This includes written texts namely descriptions, types of reports, essays, letters, chapters of books, verbal communications like lectures, meetings, seminars, discussions, etc., According to CBI the use of language includes several integrated skills and the ESL students take part in various

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activities included in the skills, like listening to comprehension or writing a review or paragraph or reading passages or answering to some questions which they have gone through. For specific purposes also the language is used. The specific purposes usages are like vocational, academic, recreational or social. When the ESL students concentrate on the different purposes their own interests relate to the purpose. In order to make the content understandable to the students the teachers need to do some modifications & simplifications just like the native speakers do in communicating with second language learners.

ROLE OF LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

In CBI the ESL students become autonomous where they learn and understand independent ally. The students take the active role among them and learn in different angles. They themselves may be the sources of content and participants in different topics and activities. Such participation “has been found to be highly motivating and has resulted in a course changing its direction in order to better meet the needs of students”. (Stryker and Leaver 1993:11) Different students have different experience in CBI. The most important thing essential to this approach is commitment. In addition, they should be prepared physically and mentally to meet the challenges in ESL classrooms. The teachers should be highly knowledgeable, well versed in language and subject matter. He / She should have clear presentation and well planning. The aim of the teacher is to help the students to develop their strategies, using appropriate techniques like error correction techniques and team building techniques. Moreover to make the ESL students understand the importance of language skills, also to develop high levels of student esteem, to identify the different categories of students and work accordingly. Content based instruction places different demands on teachers from regular ESL teaching. This will be a major challenge to the instructors.

WHY CBI IN ESL CLASSROOM?

Many schools and colleges have offered English as a second language instruction. But traditionally this instruction has focused on survival language, storytelling, grammar drills, and basic vocabulary. It has often been unrelated to what’s happening in other classes, and so hasn’t

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been sufficient to help students succeed in career. In colleges, ESL students are in need of instruction that helps to improve their language proficiency, and at the same time, to prepare these students to transform to and succeed in a much more complex academic and social environment. Yet, for ESL students to achieve in the academic and college courses, they require language ability more than identifying a vocabulary item, holding a simple conversation, or finding the main idea of a reading passage. They must be able to use the English language as a means for acquiring knowledge, in the process of engaging in the active analysis, interpretation, critique, and synthesis of information presented in English. However, prior to college, students learned the English language as a school subject with a primacy of learning grammar and vocabulary for the purpose of taking tests in school and getting a good enough grade in this subject so that they could be better qualified for applying a privileged college or University. In order to meet the challenges presented at various levels, students should learn in English age-appropriate content knowledge that reflects or reinforce the content learning in their mainstream courses, and should be able to gain English language skills in an intellectually stimulating and content-rich learning environment by using authentic and university-level materials that are relevant to their content courses. Thus, CBI approach offers a much required balance to a earlier preference for grammatical exactness using English for Second Learners textbooks, and comprehension tests. These priorities reflect the rationale or purposes for integrating language and content in the instruction of college because in a content-based instruction, students use English to expand their existing knowledge bases (Kasper, 1998), as they are presented with interdisciplinary material in a meaningful, contextualized form in which the primary focus is on the acquisition of content area information (Brinton et al., 1989) while the result is that students gradually acquire greater control of the English language, enabling them to participate more in an increasingly complex academic environment (Kasper & Singer, 1997)

.In content based instruction, learners are exposed to a considerable amount of language through stimulating content. Learners explore interesting content & are engaged in appropriate language-dependant activities. Learning language becomes automatic. Students can also develop a much wider knowledge of the world through CBI which can feed back into improving and supporting www.ijellh.com

their general educational needs. In addition, communication attainment is further promoted and motivated if the information acquired is highly relevant to students' personal and educational goals. Keeping students motivated and interested are two important factors underlying content-based instruction. When students are motivated and interested in the material they are learning, they make greater connections between topics, elaborations with learning material and can recall information better. When students learn content in, for example, Science or Social studies, the knowledge as well as the language gained from content based instruction in English class make them not only feel that they are being challenged with a high-standards curriculum, but also feel more prepared in normal classes. CBI supports contextualized learning; learners are taught in useful language that is embedded within relevant discourse contexts rather than as isolated language fragments. Students will never memorize vocabulary or grammar instead they will listen close to lectures, discussions and actively participate in many activities which will improve their communication skills. Hence students make greater connections with the language & what they already know. CBI strives to respond to students' needs and interests.

BENEFITS OF CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTION

Foreign language educators (Crandall, 1993; Short, 1997; Snow, 1998; Stoller, 2004) have promoted the advantages of content-based instruction, stating that such instruction fosters academic growth as well as developing language proficiency. Students in ESL classrooms learn it in an interesting way. They do not have the feeling of learning a subject rather than learning a language. In content based instruction students cover most of the parts like vocabulary learning, comprehension, grammar, writing summaries etc., Many activities like role play, presentations, group discussions, dialogues are given and they perform it in an interesting manner. All the four skills like listening; speaking, reading and writing get enhanced and incorporated. Content-based instruction is intended to foster the integration of language and content, viewing "language as a medium for learning content and content as a resource for learning and improving language" (Stoller, 2002). The critical thinking and creative skills of the students get enhanced and there is

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better opportunities for employment where language abilities play an important role. Moreover, content - based instruction improves a wider range of discourse skills than does traditional language instruction notes the increasing demands for high levels of literacy in languages other than English.

FINDINGS

Over the last few decades content-Based Instruction has been put into practice in a different range of language acquiring contexts. Most of the case studies regarding content-based instruction that have been reported in North America support that content-based instruction has proven to be a valuable approach to language teaching at all levels of instruction (Dueñas, 2005). In an engineering college in Coimbatore, different group of students were identified slow learners or average, etc., The students were divided into groups and content enriched lessons were given. Posters were presented along with the content. The students were made to imagine about the concern subject and the responses were collected after half – an hour. Students presented different ideas based on the topic. As the content is supported in different ways, throughout the entire unit; the students are motivated through the ability to learn various subjects in a suitable environment. Here in CBI classes, the students can take more time and receive extra support through multiple scaffolding type strategies to learn the difficult words, phrases or sentences associated with the content. Students are exposed to extensive languages while learning content in content-based classrooms. The teachers and students find out attractive content where students engage in language-dependent activities. Therefore language learning activities become natural and meaningful. Contextualized learning is activated in CBI. When the students use the content sources their self prior knowledge to learn additional language and content material is developed. Most of the students are exposed to different information and also they involve in tough activities which will improve their motivation in CBI in ESL classes. Students' adaptability and flexibility are improved in CBI in ESL classes.

CONCLUSION

Since 1980, CBI has been widely used in variety of different background. CBI in ESL classrooms focus on real communication, exchange of ideas, real learning of language. This approach is implemented at elementary level, secondary level, college level and even at the university level. Many private language institutions also follow this. Many business and vocational courses in ESL settings also implement this approach. The teachers of CBI receive unlimited opportunities. The ESL students gain many advantages of learning. They learn language naturally and it does not become artificial. The ESL students become expert in LSRW skills such as report writing, letters, essays, understanding and answering comprehension skills, presentations, group discussions and so on. In the future we can expect the CBI approach as one of the leading approaches to teach language in all ESL classrooms.

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